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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 ASHGABAT 000347

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN'S NEW STATE COUNTERNARCOTICS SERVICE
HAS MANY NEEDS, VALUES U.S. ASSISTANCE

REF: ASHGABAT 0204

11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

12. (SBU) SUMMARY: While wearing his colonel uniform -- and a new patch from the newly-formed State Counternarcotics Service, which he heads -- Murad Islamov said in a meeting with Embassy representatives on March 11 that the United States is Turkmenistan's most important partner in counternarcotics. This is no minor point, since President Berdimuhamedov has publicly stated many times over the past year that fighting drugs is one of his highest priorities. For a long time, Islamov has been an acknowledged can-do man, but his new role as head of the State Counternarcotics Service -- while retaining the previous job of Head of the State Counternarcotics Coordinating Committee -- strengthens his position in the government. Islamov made his preference clear for assistance in the form of equipment and physical structures, over training and study tours. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) has a limited window of opportunity to get in on the ground floor, but it will not be open forever. Post encourages a DEA delegation to visit as soon as possible, to assess the potential of assisting with the organization of this new, national counter-drug agency in Turkmenistan. END SUMMARY.

BACKGROUND ON THE NEW STATE COUNTERNARCOTICS SERVICE

13. (SBU) Head of the State Counternarcotics Service Murad Islamov said on March 11 that since January 18, the Service has been responsible for interdicting narcotics trafficking from neighboring countries and domestically, drug seizures, drug investigations, and drug demand reduction programs in Turkmenistan, which he coordinates from his headquarters in the former Geology Institute next to the Ministry of Internal

Affairs. The Service is a law enforcement agency staffed by ranked and uniformed military personnel. Its work will be focused at Turkmenistan's border crossing checkpoints, but also will have offices at the regional and local levels. The Service has its own lab and will have its own training facility. In addition, it coordinates international cooperation and assistance.

HOW THE SERVICE WILL WORK WITH OTHER AGENCIES

14. (SBU) Islamov retains his position as Head of the State Counternarcotics Coordinating Committee, a "drug czar" role in which he coordinates counternarcotics activities among all government agencies. Islamov said that government entities such as the State Border Service and State Customs Service that have been involved in counternarcotics efforts will continue to work in this sphere because "crime is crime," but the State Counternarcotics Service will specialize in fighting narcotics on all fronts, including working side-by-side with other law enforcement agencies. For example, while a Customs agent may search a vehicle for various forms of contraband, an officer of the State Counternarcotics Service will focus on interdicting drugs. He added that his officers will interdict narcotics trafficked via the Caspian Sea from Turkmenbashi City, not on vessels.

APPRECIATES U.S. ASSISTANCE...

15. (SBU) Islamov acknowledged that the U.S. is the country's largest partner in the fight against narcotics and gave thanks in particular for the "concrete assistance" given, saying that it "really helps" in counternarcotics efforts and

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in strengthening border control.

...AND ISN'T AFRAID TO ASK FOR MORE

16. (SBU) Islamov said he still was in the process of hiring personnel, and his priority for assistance was instructional material -- including training course syllabi, law enforcement instruction manuals, reference books, and methodologies -- used in training drug enforcement officers. He was interested to learn how the DEA trained its personnel and what communications, observation, and other special equipment DEA uses in interdicting a criminal group. His second priority was acquiring new equipment through either assistance or his own budget. He said that he could buy some new equipment with his own budget, but requested U.S. advice on which were the best counternarcotics tools currently available on the market. He sought info on U.S. companies that produce counternarcotics equipment and also on DEA's organizational structure. He was especially interested in empowering his agents on the border with powerful computers and software used by counternarcotics professionals worldwide. He also would like assistance in training and use of search dogs. He was pleased that the truck scanners being installed at the border crossing station currently under construction in Farap are stationary, adding that the State Customs Service would have control of the scanners if they could be used for searching for material other than drugs.

INTERESTED IN THE COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM

17. (SBU) Islamov said that his organization wants to participate in the CENTCOM-funded counternarcotics communications project already underway in Turkmenistan. He said that he preferred a more expanded radio system, including two-way communication (telephone) capability, as opposed to one-way radio communication. He added that telephony is the priority need, but he would also like to be able to send photographs and documents electronically via this system. The Embassy's project manager is currently in the process of quantifying the scope of what would be necessary to connect all law enforcement agencies in this

counternarcotics information-sharing system. Islamov said that he would be interested in expanding the system by introducing various features in phases, on a yearly basis.

FEEDBACK ON TRAINING PROGRAMS

18. (SBU) Islamov expressed personal interest in all forms of training courses for himself and his staff. He requested that post ask his opinion before planning training programs to ensure that it will be beneficial to the participants, and to make sure the right participants are selected. He prefers to review hard copies of U.S. Government proposals in advance -- if funding has not been located or approved, post should clearly state in a diplomatic note that this is a "preliminary proposal" -- and the note should also clearly state which agencies are intended to participate in the training or receive the equipment. In Islamov's opinion, it is a waste of time to send low-level officers on study tours, because they are not the ones who can apply their experiences. Higher level professionals and trainers can spread the knowledge throughout the ranks and can implement their new knowledge in practice. He also thinks that it is a waste of time to spend time in training programs demonstrating equipment that is taken away when the course is over. He is not very interested in conferences.

19. (SBU) COMMENT: Islamov is in charge of building an

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entire counternarcotics agency from the ground floor up. This is a unique time during which new ties can be formed or expanded with the international counternarcotics community. Turkmenistan needs real experts who can help coordinate this organization's evolution. If the Drug Enforcement Agency were to send a team as soon as possible for meetings with Colonel Muradov and other law enforcement agency leaders, the U.S. Government potentially has an opportunity to capitalize on the strong relationship that has been built with Colonel Islamov and others over a period of many years, and to work hand-in-hand to organize the State Counternarcotics Service. Post can make no promises about how close Islamov will let U.S. or foreign partners into his organization. Based on the current relationship and ongoing counternarcotics assistance, the United States has the best chance through DEA to put them on a productive, more transparent coordinated course. No U.S. Department or agency has been able to reach this level of cooperation with a Turkmen government counterpart organization before. However, this window of opportunity may not be open in six months, so post requests DEA come not only more often, but indeed as soon as possible. END COMMENT.
HOAGLAND